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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS EPET SY I2

SUBJECT: CHALABI DISCUSSES RECENT TRAVEL TO SYRIA WITH  
AMBASSADOR, BARZANI

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) In a December 15 meeting, Ahmed Chalabi discussed his recent trip to Syria with the Ambassador and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani. In an unofficial visit, Chalabi met with Syrian officials including Vice President Farouk al-Shara, Foreign Minister Walid al-Muhalleb, and Mohammed Nassif, former head of internal security for Syria's General Security Directorate. Chalabi did not meet with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and did not accompany former Iraqi Prime Minister, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, who also visited Iran in mid-December.

¶2. (S) According to Chalabi, Syrian officials offered their assistance to the Iraqi government. Al-Muhalleb, Chalabi said, praised the GOI, saying "he has lots of friends in Iraq and does not want to cause trouble." Syrian officials noted that senior Baath party leaders and GOI oppositionists present in Syria strain relations with Iraq. The Syrians told Chalabi that several Sunni leaders recently left Syria citing Harith al-Dari as an example. Syrian officials told Chalabi that Al-Dari, a Sunni oppositionist and leader of the Association of Muslim scholars, recently left Syria and will travel to Saudi Arabia and then Cairo.

¶3. (S) The Syrian FM wants to improve border security and increase coordination with the Iraqis, Chalabi commented. The Syrian officials told Chalabi they also want to find ways to expand economic relations. According to Chalabi, they suggested that one way to increase economic cooperation would be to transport and sell oil from Kirkuk to Syria.

KHALILZAD